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ABSTRACT

Noting evidence that many American children and youth are at risk, this report suggests ways to build effective communities through effective partnerships and services that are coordinated across systems and aligned across levels of government. The report discusses the efforts of the Working Group formed to consider how federal, state, and local governments can improve results for preschool and school-aged children and their families. Also discussed are the steps necessary to achieve these partnership goals, including: (1) assessing conditions, assets, and resources to assist in setting priorities for resource allocation and accountability; (2) developing compatible goals and coordinated plans for improving results; (3) ensuring shared accountability for equity and results; (4) reviewing and aligning policies and allocating all available resources to positively affect the highest priorities in a community; and (5) designing and reconfiguring programs, services, supports, and infrastructure to help families, children, and communities grow stronger. The first part of the report is a general discussion of issues relating to at-risk youths, such as fragmentation and failure to resolve problems. This part introduces measures to meet the community's needs and allocate resources, and discusses the roles of the federal and state governments. The second part of the report discusses strategies for developing local flexibility in implementing comprehensive services focused on young children and their families. This part touches upon topics such as finance, decision making, and state and federal collaboration issues and their solutions, and provides a table of key steps for achieving better results for children and families. A list of the members of the Working Group concludes the report. (MOK)

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ED 394 743

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER: EFFECTIVE COMMUNITIES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

March 15, 1996

PS 024265

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Executive Summary

MANY AMERICAN CHILDREN AND YOUTH ARE STILL AT RISK. Poor health, violence, poverty, education gaps, family disruption, and lack of access to essential human services severely limit the chances our children and youth have to become vital, contributing members of the larger society. If policymakers do not make a commitment to achieving better results for children and families, many children will not develop the skills, habits and knowledge they need to contribute to society — and communities across the country will face escalating social, economic, and welfare costs.

In its search for solutions to these urgent concerns, Congress in 1994 directed the formation of a working group to consider how federal, state, and local governments can improve results for preschool and school-aged children and their families. The House Report language directs "the Secretaries of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services, and other relevant agencies to convene a working group to review and evaluate the concept of developing and implementing a federal initiative creating comprehensive early childhood family centers, with school-based siting being a specific focus, that will allow pre-school and school-aged students and their families easy access to a broad range of co-located education, health, and social services." The working group, whose 21 members are experts in a range of education and human services, was convened by the federal departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services in 1995. This report reflects the group members' concerns and their suggested strategies for improvement*.

The working group members believe that the solutions lie in personal actions, family actions, and community actions, and in continued restructuring and linking efforts at all levels of government and within communities. The report suggests that linking education and related services to families at schools and other neighborhood sites is one effective means of supporting children and families, but that these linkages cannot be effectively implemented

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*This report is the result of discussions among members of the Working Group. The guidance contained in the report does not necessarily reflect the views of any individual group member, organization with which members are affiliated, or federal agency.

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without changes in the systems that serve children and families. Instead of outlining a separate federal initiative to establish early childhood family centers, members of the Working Group have developed a framework for changes in federal, state, and community roles to establish linkages among programs serving children, families, and communities across the nation. Policies and initiatives that create strong, effective communities can help sustain healthy families, which in turn foster better education, health and well-being of children and stronger economic and social development for all citizens. This report suggests ways to build effective communities through effective partnerships and services that are coordinated across systems and aligned across levels of government.

The working group members advocate flexible community responses that link allocation of resources with community investment, responsibility, and accountability for better results for children and families. The group members urge each level of government to implement five key steps toward better results for children and families:

(1) Assess conditions, assets, and resources to assist in setting priorities for resource allocation and accountability;

(2) Develop compatible goals and coordinated plans for improving results;

(3) Ensure shared accountability for equity and results;

(4) Review and align policies and allocate all available resources to positively impact the highest priorities in a community;

(5) Design and reconfigure programs, services, supports, and infrastructure to help families, children, and communities grow stronger.

In taking these steps, the agencies, governments, service providers, and communities will have to set goals and reallocate resources to better meet priorities. And the three levels of government will have to embrace roles that support a shifting of accountability for results, as well as authority and responsibility, to communities. In particular, the new federal role proposed by the working group members would establish a strong infrastructure that states and communities could use to make children, youth, and families stronger and healthier and to improve learning. The federal government would:

- Define the national interest in improving results for children, families, and communities. Congress, working with the President, should direct federal agencies to assess (1) the conditions of children and families; (2) federal programs, roles, and goals that address these conditions; (3) the unique "value added" by each agency's programs and priorities; and (4) the allocation of federal resources to support children, families, and communities. Federal agencies should use the assessment to allocate resources and determine accountability measures. Congress should review its committee structure and develop better coordinating mechanisms to ensure attention to the assessment.

- Be explicit about the desired results across all agencies so that goals, objectives, regulations, and resource allocations can be aligned across agencies to support families, children, and community institutions. The federal government should make sure that the education and well-being of children and families is a national priority by helping states and communities to identify the results they want and benchmarks to measure their progress in achieving them. For priority goals, Congress, working with the President, should create cross-agency initiatives by linking existing efforts that serve the same populations. Congress also should allow and encourage federal agencies to create a cross-agency structure for coordinated planning, research, and evaluation. The federal government should work with other public, nongovernmental agencies, nonprofit, and community-based and education groups to support the most progressive state and community initiatives and to disseminate lessons from their efforts. And Congress should create mechanisms to mobilize and encourage innovative agency strategies to increase access to private and nonprofit expertise that can contribute to achieving priority goals.

- Set benchmarks and performance indicators to measure these results and keep track of progress of states and interested communities across America.

- Ensure shared accountability for equity and results. The federal government should use the results of the cross-agency assessment to determine resource allocation and accountability measures. Congress and the Executive Branch should use the national goals as an overarching structure and guide for a federal, state, and local partnership with shared responsibility for the healthy development of children, youth, and families.

- Negotiate partnerships with states and local jurisdictions to support initiatives. The Ed-Flex authority under the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which allows six states the authority to grant waivers of federal regulations to local education agencies, provides a model for increasing flexibility of federal funding streams in exchange for improved results at the local level. Congress would develop incentives to give federal agencies the authority and flexibility to develop collaborative cross-agency initiatives. The federal government

should develop incentives for state and local agencies to support integrated approaches and to develop capacity for leadership and accountability. Title XI of the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ESEA, which allows local school districts flexibility in the use of ESEA funds for programs of comprehensive services, is one such effort.

- Share successful practices and provide cross-agency technical assistance to states and communities in planning, operating, and developing systems of accountability for comprehensive programs. The federal government should collect and publish data from each state relevant to its progress in achieving priority results for children and families and communities.

This report also outlines roles for states and communities and contains guidance for each level of government in implementing the five steps described above.

It is clear that without the full, healthy development of all children and youth, our country will be unable to fully meet the needs of a changing economy and the demands for participation it will place on all citizens. The nation cannot afford to fail its children; and if federal, state, and local policy makers implement changes in systems and programs that support families and children, we need not fail.

Putting the Pieces Together:
Effective Communities for Children and Families

REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

THE NATION IS STILL AT RISK

Many American children and youth are still in crisis. An alarming number of children live in poverty and lack the most basic conditions for healthy development and educational success, while their families struggle to find solutions within their reach. Poor health, violence, poverty, low levels of family literacy, family disruption, and lack of access to essential human services severely limit children's chances of becoming vital, contributing members of their community and this nation. The problems facing children and families are not limited to low-income areas; many communities strain to meet the urgent, multiple needs of their residents and to support families. These communities, like children and families, are challenged by declining resources and the overwhelming need for supports. As a result, our children are coming of age in a country where:

- In 1990, one third of women giving birth had inadequate prenatal care;[1]
- The poverty rate among children under the age of 18 has increased from 19 percent in 1989 to 22 percent in 1994;[2]
- In 1990, 7 percent of the eighth-grade class of 1988 (most of whom were then fifteen and sixteen years old) were dropouts. By their senior year (1992), 12 percent of this class were dropouts. Dropout rates vary by students' race/ethnicity: white (9.4); black (14.5); Hispanic (18.3) Asian/Pacific Islanders (7.0); and American Indian (25.4).[3]
- Children growing up in single-parent families were twice as likely as those from married-couple families to drop out of high school in 1992 - and the percentage of single-parent families increased from 21 percent in 1985 to 25 percent in 1992.[4]

- From 1980 to 1992, the rate of suicide among young adolescents increased 120 percent and increased most dramatically among young black males (300 percent) and young white females (233 percent).[5]

The conditions of vulnerable children are not new. But in a time of limited resources and increasing expectations, they call for attention to new strategies and solutions to meet the challenge.

Fragmentation Undermines Our Potential to do Much Better

Too much of the way current federal, state, and local programs attempt to work with children and families focuses on narrowly defined problems, is fragmented, and responds primarily to crisis situations. There is a lack of alignment among levels of government and a lack of coordination across agencies and systems. Each program has its own discrete policies, goals, funding system, and requirements. Some services are tangled in contradictory eligibility requirements. Isolated programs treat clients as "cases" rather than as members of families and communities, and focus on "fixing" immediate problems rather than upon developing long-term self-sufficiency.

Recently enacted federal legislation allows local communities increased flexibility within agency funding streams, including Ed-Flex provisions which allow six states to approve local requests, waiver provisions in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Goals 2000: Educate America Act, and provisions for consolidated planning and administration of education programs. However, there is a need for local communities to coordinate funding streams across agencies and programs, as well as within them. Provisions within existing legislation that allow local communities flexibility in spending federal funds, such as Title XI of the ESEA and Title XX of the Social Services Block Grant, provide a model for other federal programs to link formal and informal community resources.

Often, the services themselves are flawed and inadequate as well as fragmented. For example, by focusing only on treating a crisis manifested during adolescence, programs fail to identify (much less solve) the many interrelated problems that contribute to a single crisis — and they miss the opportunity to promote healthy development by addressing children's needs

at an earlier stage, before they become crises. They too often fail to engage precious human resources in communities — those of families and youth themselves, as well as those of business and the private sector. And they frequently are funded through short-term discretionary programs that are insufficient for families, local schools, social service agencies and community institutions to change underlying conditions. Despite the best of intentions, they have not been sufficient to produce the needed results.

Fragmentation of Services Has a Direct Impact on Children and Families

- *The lack of coordination among eligibility procedures—not to mention outright contradictions among requirements—practically ensures that children and families will not receive all the services they need. To help policymakers understand eligibility issues from a family's perspective, the Institute for Educational Leadership's Policy Exchange compiled all the forms a single low-income family would need to apply for programs for which they might be eligible. The resulting workbook had 835 pages.*[6]

- *Fragmented service systems are daunting for all Americans—not just for low-income families. In March 1994, for example, a middle-class couple became the foster parents of an 18-month-old and three-year-old brother and sister. "Since that time, we have dealt with 50 different public and private agencies on behalf of these children and their parents," the foster father reports. His assessment of the maze of programs and services: "Failure by fragmentation."*[7]

Failure to Resolve These Problems Carries a Stiff Price Tag

It is in the national interest to improve the well-being and education of our children, youth, and families. If Americans fail to make a commitment now to achieving better results for children and families, communities across the country will face escalating social, economic, and welfare costs. Rapid changes in technology and the demands of an international economy require that all children and youth develop the skills and attitudes

necessary to live productive lives in the twenty-first century and contribute to our democratic way of life. Our young people will come of age in a society that depends on them to be:

- Educated and resourceful - possessing knowledge, skills, and problem-solving abilities that enable them to engage in meaningful, sustained occupations and play an active part in this democracy.
- Healthy—in a state of physical, mental, and social well being, not simply without disease or infirmity;
- Ethical and caring—having respect for self and others, and able to develop and maintain caring relationships; and
- Contributing—involved in the common good within local communities, their state and this nation.

Without significant support, many American children will never have the chance to develop these skills and attributes; without the full, healthy development of all children and youth, our country will be unable to fully meet the needs of a changing economy and the demands for participation it will place on all citizens. If the needs of the most vulnerable members of the population are not met, our goals of democracy and equitable opportunity for all will be grossly compromised. The nation cannot afford to fail its children.

An Opportunity for Effective Change and Progress

In states and communities across the country, policies and initiatives are promoting strong, effective communities that build healthy families, which in turn foster better results for children and stronger economic and social development for all citizens. These communities offer a framework for designing solutions in collaboration with the people who are most affected by them — a way to reach parents, community residents, local education, health, social service, community and religious organizations, and business people to enlist their help in achieving better results for children. Within this framework, with support from the federal government as well as other governmental and non-profit agencies, communities can plan and implement strategies such as comprehensive centers to serve children and families as well as

other solutions to meet that meet the community's needs and make effective use of its resources.

Congress has placed increased attention on state and community solutions to social and education problems in proposals for welfare reform, workforce preparation, and adult education. If these proposals are implemented, the attention must be extended to focus on the opportunities and challenges presented to communities and states to consider their capacity and responsibilities to help individuals and families.

The strategies outlined in this report focus on building effective communities through comprehensive, effective services and supports that are coordinated across systems and aligned across levels of government. These services and supports:

- Share a vision about high-quality comprehensive services for children and support for parents' economic independence
- Maintain continuity of support for children across programs and age groups
- Blend resources from several funding streams in a way that makes the services "seamless" from the perspective of children and families
- Can be located in many settings, including school-based centers and community locations
- Have a strong commitment to staff, including developing a shared vision and effective teamwork, ongoing staff training and professional development, and adequate compensation

A locally designed comprehensive services initiative is a key component of a strong community and an approach that reflects the interests and involvement of families, youth, and communities; provides better, more efficient supports; improves coordination to make services more accessible and more responsive; and reduces costs while improving effectiveness.

Comprehensive Initiatives Make Services More Efficient and Effective

- *In 1992, Vermont introduced a "Success by Six" program which greatly expanded its capacity to reach every preschool child and family in the state. Services, including home visiting, were delivered through Parent Child Centers, the Health Department, and school nurses. The past two years have seen a marked decrease in the number of child abuse victims statewide, including a 17 percent decrease in abuse of children between birth and age six. Source: Vermont Agency of Human Services*

- *In Savannah, Georgia, the Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority operates several programs designed to improve results for preschool and school-aged children and their families, including: (1) a Healthy Start initiative to reduce infant mortality; (2) a Youth Service Corps to provide educational support, work skills, and ethics training to young adults who have not finished high school; and (3) a comprehensive family resource center that offers child development and child care for preschool children, after-school and Saturday activities for school-aged children, and family advocacy and support for local families and youth. These efforts have improved school attendance and reduced the number of students over-age for their grade level, the number of students suspended from school, and the percentage of middle-school students who read below grade level. Source: Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority*

- *At 42 School-Based Youth Services Centers throughout the state of New Jersey, adolescents and children can obtain a variety of services and participate in positive peer group activities that help them graduate and lead healthy lives. Students can drop in or be referred by teachers, parents, the courts, and others to gain access to comprehensive services on a one-stop-shopping basis. The program has proven effective, reducing pregnancy at one high school from 20 to two cases per year. The program is also cost-effective: full participation in the state-funded program costs $200 a year for each child or youth, compared with a cost of approximately $20,000 a year to support a family on AFDC. Source: New Jersey Department of Human Resources*

Comprehensive services are not new. There are programs of school- and community-linked services for children and families in states and localities across the country. Members

of the Working Group support the establishment of centers on school sites and other strategies that will expand access to comprehensive services for children and families. But members of the group call for an approach that will expand access by defining a strong role for communities, with citizen and family involvement, in designing and carrying out efforts to support children and families, and hold local, state, and federal agencies accountable for the results of their efforts. This report does not simply call for another federal initiative to join the dozens of existing programs aimed at meeting the needs of disadvantaged Americans. We know that community-based comprehensive services can be effective; hundreds of stories like the ones outlined above tell us that. We also know that individual local initiatives within the current federal and state systems, including those based at schools, are difficult to implement. Local leaders in those systems are challenged to develop and sustain effective programs for children, youth and families using an ever-changing base of multiple, uncoordinated programs, funding streams, and service delivery systems as well as constantly changing local, state and national leadership. Unless key components of systems can be coordinated, including funding, eligibility, and staffing, comprehensive initiatives addressing real priorities in a community will continue to depend on special funding to survive. Unless they are able to connect their programs to major funding streams, they will not be able to help more than a small fraction of children and families.

The Working Group was charged by Congress with considering, " a federal initiative creating comprehensive early childhood family centers, with school-based siting being a specific focus, that will allow pre-school and school-aged students and their families easy access to a broad range of co-located education, health and social services." Several members of the group are actively involved in planning and operating exemplary school-based centers for children and families or have done so in the recent past. These practitioners have worked in communities with federal, state and local programs and have created initiatives that bring them together. Working Group members affirm that:

- School facilities are an important resource in every community and should be made available to serve members of the broader community;
- School staff and school resources should be involved in planning and providing programs that support children, families, and the community;
- In some communities, the school may be the most appropriate location for programs to serve children and families, while in other communities, a housing

project, community center or other location may be preferred by families. The location for these programs should be determined by members of the community itself.

A new federal initiative for comprehensive centers at school sites would have the potential to create programs in a few communities. What is needed is a continued endeavor to restructure and link efforts at all levels of government and within communities to meet locally identified needs of families and children.

To support this type of systems change, members of the Working Group on Comprehensive Services believe that federal, states, and local governments should work together to:

- **Create solutions built on accountability,** forging a strong connection between resource allocation, community investment, and results. A commitment to achieving better results for children, youth, and families requires being clear about the desired results and measuring the extent to which they are achieved. Instead of accounting for the prescribed expenditure of funds and the number of eligible people who pass through a program's doors, comprehensive initiatives must determine whether programs and efforts are making a difference and feed that information back to stakeholders in the community. Federal, state, and community governments must determine a "budget baseline" of resources allocated across agencies for children and families and establish "results-based budgeting" that ties allocations for programs to demonstrated results that address particular issues.

- **Establish community-driven responses** to local needs by involving families, community members, and a broad range of stakeholders in finding solutions that support local and state priorities. By supporting community-based planning, diverse segments of a community can work together to find solutions that match local needs and resources. Local responses should also include the disadvantaged, vulnerable, and underrepresented citizens—the people who most need help but are hardest to engage from the federal and state levels. They should be supported by intensive efforts to create local infrastructure, including capacity-building and development of information systems.

- **Support strong families** by laying a foundation during early childhood to prevent the conditions that interfere with healthy development during childhood and adolescence. Programs that connect parents and teachers as allies on behalf of children help improve children's achievement and sense of efficacy in school. Programs that help increase parents' literacy or prepare them for

employment, can also help them understand their children's development and school experiences. Programs that help parents and adolescents resolve conflicts enable adolescents to live productive lives and reduce dependence on drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.

- **Facilitate flexible, custom-made solutions** that build on local resources to serve children, families, and communities. Flexible responses should strengthen publicly-supported institutions in the community (e.g., schools, health clinics, housing agencies) and informal supports within communities e.g., family day care, sports teams and arts activities, Boys and Girls Clubs, and other activities that contribute to the development of positive social skills and responsible behavior. Communities are more than a collection of public services; they are total environments that play a major role in developing capable, healthy citizens. Strong formal and informal support systems give communities the "social capital" that children and families require.

Effective Solutions Will Require Bold Changes at All Levels of Governance

Implementing the changes proposed by this report will require more than a system for devolving authority to run programs to states and communities, although that is one important element. Improving results for children and families will require changes in action at all levels, from Congress to the schoolyard. It will require defining a national priority for children and families, redefining roles and responsibilities of federal, state, and local agencies and identifying stable, sufficient funding sources for communities. And it will depend on building new, collaborative relationships among community members, between community members and agency staff, and among the public and private sectors within communities.

If we are to truly improve results for children, all agencies, governments, service providers, and communities will have to set specific goals and reallocate resources to better meet priorities. Programs, services, and support systems will have to use limited resources in ways that are more collaborative and coordinated. And the three levels of government will have to continue to embrace new, interlocking roles that support accountability for results as well as a shifting of authority and responsibility to communities.

The Federal Role

The federal government has traditionally played a role in protecting vulnerable citizens—children and the poor, sick, and disabled—through special programs. The resulting proliferation of programs makes it hard to account for dollars and success. The direction of the President and Congress is to consolidate programs in order to provide greater flexibility. Along with increased flexibility and decreased fragmentation, communities must still be accountable for supporting vulnerable populations and implementing programs that address national priorities.

A cross-cutting federal role would establish a strong infrastructure that states and communities could use to make children, youth, and families stronger, healthier, and better educated. Specifically, the federal government, as envisioned by members of the Working Group, would:

- **Ensure that children are a national priority**. The President and Congress, working together should direct the relevant federal agencies to assess (1) the conditions of families and children; (2) the federal programs, roles, and goals that address these conditions; and (3) the allocation of resources in support of children, families, and communities. Federal agencies should use this assessment to determine resource allocation and accountability measures. Congress should review its committee structures and develop better coordinating mechanisms to ensure attention to the cross-agency assessment.

- **Articulate desired results** across all sectors that are in the national interest so that goals, objectives, regulations, and resource allocations can be aligned across agencies to support the new national agenda. The federal government should develop cross-cutting goals for children and families, using existing federal/state efforts such as the National Education Goals and the Healthy People 2000 goals. For priority goals, Congress should create cross-agency initiatives by coordinating key elements of existing initiatives that serve the same populations.

  To support the new national goals, Congress should require federal agencies to create a cross-agency structure that will support unified planning. The federal government should develop an initiative to work with other public and non-governmental agencies to support the most progressive state initiatives. And Congress should create mechanisms to mobilize and increase access to private and nonprofit expertise that can contribute to achieving priority goals.

- **Help states and communities track progress** toward achieving the national priorities for children and families. The federal government should collect and publish data from each state relevant to its progress.

- **Ensure shared accountability** for equity and results. The federal government should use the results of the cross-agency assessment to determine resource allocation and accountability measures. Congress and the Executive Branch should use the national goals as infrastructure for a federal, state, and local partnership with shared responsibility for the healthy development of children, youth, and families.

- **Negotiate partnerships** with states and local jurisdictions to support initiatives to achieve the desired results. These partnerships should increase flexibility of federal funding streams in exchange for improved results at the local level. Congress also should develop incentives to give federal agencies the authority and flexibility to develop collaborative, cross-sector initiatives. The federal government should continue to develop incentives for state and local agencies to support integrated approaches and to develop capacity for accountability.

- **Share lessons learned as well as successful practices**. Federal agencies should work to provide cross-agency technical assistance to states and local communities in planning, operating, and developing systems of accountability for comprehensive programs. Federal agencies can also assist by documenting the progress of comprehensive initiatives, to enable states and local communities to learn from the experiences of previous initiatives.

The State Role

The current direction of the President and Congress would move the federal role away from so many narrow categorical programs toward providing broader grants with broad goals and greater flexibility. For example, in the FY 1996 budget, the Department of Education proposed eliminating 36 education programs, beginning the phase-out of 5 additional programs, and consolidating 27 programs. As the federal role changes, the state role must also change. Pending legislation would consolidate many of these programs and give states wide latitude in designing programs that will meet their individual priorities. However, the legislation will also significantly reduce federal funding, including freezing expenditures at prior levels or even lower.

The new combination of flexibility and reduced funding forces states to examine more closely the ways that they work with other levels of government to provide services. States must:

- **Streamline systems**. There is a real opportunity to streamline bureaucratic systems and provide services more comprehensively across departments. Alignment of goals and services across departments will entail major changes in attitudes among staff and administrators, shifting and merging funds among departments, and strong leadership from governors, state education, human services, labor, and health officials, legislators and other key state leaders.

- **Provide technical assistance**. Each state must establish a mechanism for providing information, resources, capacity-building, access to technology, and technical assistance to support local planning. States should identify and eliminate barriers and mandates from the federal level and within the state government that impede achievement of state and local goals, and help federal agencies identify barriers that need to be eliminated.

- **Share proven practices**. States must establish systems for collecting and disseminating information on local projects, strategies, and practices. States should develop incentives for local communities to develop and practice collaborative approaches, including creation of flexible funding pools to address high-priority issues and results-based, innovative approaches. States, working with federal agencies should develop ways to share what works across America.

- **Negotiate new partnerships with federal and local governments**. As states move to devolve power to the local level, they must develop new relationships with the federal government and with communities. States should have authority to translate federal goals into state benchmarks; use federal funds more flexibly; and negotiate with local planning groups when establishing performance targets, rewards, sanctions, and processes for technical assistance.

- **Track results**. States have a key role in accountability systems; as the federal government establishes national goals, states must develop priorities, standards and performance targets, reporting requirements, and benchmarks for achieving the goals. States must work with communities to develop ways of measuring progress toward desired results as well as incentives, rewards, and sanctions linked to the goals for children, families, and communities.

- **Build public support for change**. Governors and other key state officials are in a unique role to involve all non-governmental resources—businesses, non-profit organizations, universities, and foundations—to address the needs of children and youth, from volunteer efforts to financial support. Private citizens

and business can help develop infrastructure that supports comprehensive solutions, including information systems, professional development, and technical assistance.

Roles for Communities

Building healthy communities challenges the commitment and skills of policymakers and community leaders. Policymakers must be committed to engaging community members and to bringing stakeholders together to develop an agenda for needed change and improvement. They must also help build the capacity of the community to make decisions by sharing information, soliciting ideas, and providing continuing opportunities for feedback and response. Policymakers must value the expertise that community members bring to the table—even though it may be different from "professional" expertise.

If communities are to be accountable for better results for children and families, they must:

- **Define their boundaries**. A community can be a city government, district, parish, police precinct, neighborhood, or school attendance area. To make the community as effective and supportive of children and families as possible, its boundaries should be determined at the local level, and no single service field, organization, or agency should dominate.

- **Form a mechanism for shared decision making by an array of local stakeholders**. Few communities currently have a mechanism for setting priorities for supporting the healthy development of children and families and improving education. Although local circumstances determine who should participate in decision making, input from a broad network of individuals and organizations is essential. In some neighborhoods, the parent-school council might have the respect needed to set priorities for results beyond the boundaries of the education system. Other communities will require a new group that includes organizations and service providers from the community's diverse economic, ethnic, and linguistic groups. Developing trust and commitment to shared decisionmaking at the community level is often challenging and time-consuming, as barriers of territoriality and history must be overcome. The credibility of the decisionmaking body is strengthened by the involvement of local elected policymakers.

- **Assess the conditions of people in the community. Existing data across all agencies** can be used to create an overall picture of the needs and assets of people in the community.

- **Review current funding to create an inventory of the community's investment** in children and families. A budget baseline sets the stage for (1) reviewing allocations to priority areas, (2) evaluating whether funding levels are sufficient to address existing conditions, and (3) examining whether current strategies are effective. Creating a budget baseline across programs for children and families exposes program gaps and service duplication. This process reveals the extent to which a community's service and support systems pursue separate agendas and lays the groundwork for a new, integrated system that cuts across all organizations and systems in the community.

  This step in developing accountability is crucial. If policymakers try to measure long-term results without assessing the adequacy of resources devoted to the task, the results - and the process for measuring them - will be suspect. At the same time, agencies and community groups need to have a realistic understanding of what it takes to achieve the results that will be measured.

- **Set priorities** for community-wide results. Communities must develop a sense of priorities among the many issues that confront them before they can set their sights on achieving specific results. The effort will require willingness to change current funding and program methods—and, perhaps, to assign lower priorities to other issues.

- **Determine the connections among results** at the agency, program, and community levels. The commitment to specific results from each agency is an essential first step. But a single agency cannot be held accountable for changing community-wide results- it can only be evaluated by how well it improves services for its own customers. When communities move toward shared accountability for community-wide results, they should develop an understanding of the interconnectedness of community risk factors and program goals. Accountability flows from negotiated priorities and from agreement on which results will inform annual reports and budget changes. Communities should have flexibility in determining priority results, within broad goals established at the state and federal levels. There should be provisions for higher jurisdictions to choose and enforce other priorities.

- **Set benchmarks to measure and understand progress** toward desired results. Communities should distinguish between short-term and long-range results and between results for consumers and those for systems. Accountability should be based on short-term progress in the right direction as well as longer-term

results. It is important to understand and track changes in the institutions or systems as well as changes in the behavior and conditions.

- **Develop a method for public reporting**. Once a community has collected data on results, stakeholders should decide how to use the information. Should the findings be published in an annual "report card" ? How will they inform agency budget allocations? These decisions should be driven by local needs and goals.

Communities should make the search for solutions accessible to all residents. The discussion must reach and include the people who traditionally feel alienated or excluded from the public process because of their language, culture, race, or socioeconomic status. New participation brings valuable new ideas and broad-based investment in the improvement process.

The need to engage the community carries a mandate to pay serious attention to issues facing all the people in the community, so that the shift to results-based accountability leads to a range of strategies that support the attainment of goals in our increasingly diverse communities. This new level of engagement of the public can be a strategy for broader community revitalization; although education, health care, and social services form an essential core for healthy development, they are intertwined with issues of juvenile justice, employment and training, and physical, cultural and economic development, and many communities will want to develop broader unified responses that incorporate multiple strategies.

Key Steps in Accomplishing These Changes

This report offers a road map for federal, state, and local policymakers to use as they embark on these changes. In response to a Congressional directive, the Working Group on Comprehensive Services has considered the need for more comprehensive approaches to the needs of children, youth, and families. The group does not seek a separate federal initiative for comprehensive early childhood family centers. Instead, it has identified five key steps that will create the essential conditions for change outlined above. The working group has also identified activities at each level of governance—federal, state, and local—that must be taken to support the key steps.

These steps are to:

- **Assess conditions, assets, and resources** to assist in setting priorities for resource allocation and accountability;
- **Develop unified goals** and compatible, coordinated plans for improving results;
- **Ensure shared accountability** for equity and results;
- **Review and align policies and allocate all available resources** to implement priorities;
- **Design and reconfigure programs, services, supports, and infrastructure** to achieve results.

In the next section, the report discusses more specific application of these steps to programs serving young children and their families. Guidance on each of the suggested steps for federal, state, and local policymakers is discussed in the matrix following the subgroup report.

Notes

1. Annie E. Casey Foundation (1991). KIDS COUNT Data Book. Baltimore, MD: Author, P. 11.

2. U. S. Bureau of the Census (1994). Materials from the Income and Poverty Press Briefing, October 1994.

3. National Center for Education Statistics. (1994). The condition of education, 1994. Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office.

4. Annie E. Casey Foundation (1995). KIDS COUNT Data Book. Baltimore, MD: Author, pp. 13-15.

5. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Suicide among children, adolescents, and young adults-United States, 1980-1992. Vol. 44, No. 15.

6. Institute for Educational Leadership, The Policy Exchange (1995). Workbook of Application Packets for San Diego Assistance Programs. Washington DC: Author.

7. Sidney Gardner, Director, Center for Collaboration for Children, California State University, Fullerton, personal communication

Working Group on Comprehensive Services
Subgroup on Programs for Young Children and Families

A subgroup of the Working Group on Comprehensive Services met to discuss strategies for developing local flexibility in implementing comprehensive services focused on young children and their families and to recommend actions at the federal, state, and local levels that could facilitate such services. The group included federal program staff from the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services as well as local practitioners representing Head Start and a family education center. Participants discussed programs and issues in terms of governance, finance, supports and services, accountability, and professional development. They highlighted supports and barriers to implementation of comprehensive services throughout the conversation.

The participants' discussion of specific problems and solutions is summarized below:

Finance Issues and Solutions

Participants, especially those from the local level, identified the sizable administrative burden associated with juggling numerous budgets. Administrators working with a number of programs must deal with multiple eligibility requirements, funding cycles, and reporting and evaluation procedures that are often at odds with each other or duplicative. This entails a great deal of time and paperwork, confuses staff, and can make implementing a comprehensive service program an overwhelming challenge. One local practitioner described her program as a "braid"; to provide comprehensive services, she is able with great effort to weave services together but must also be able to pull the strands apart for reporting and budgeting.

Solutions that would help to resolve these problems include:

- Reduce and coordinate program reporting requirements to reduce administrative time spent on such issues and allow time to use evaluation data they collect to improve programs. Programs would also gain time for self-assessment and reflection.

- Develop more flexible budgeting opportunities to allow programs to pool funding and coordinate services

- Provide longer funding cycles to give projects time to concentrate on implementation and evaluation rather on than continually applying for funds

Decisionmaking Issues and Solutions

Communities often experience difficulty in implementing comprehensive services because of fragmented decisionmaking and priorities. This fragmentation is often mandated by state and local regulations regarding creation of separate program-specific bodies for program planning and oversight. Such fragmentation can also occur because local entities must compete with each other for the same funds, creating turf issues.

Solutions to these problems include:

- Provide structures for pooling funding to allow communities to integrate programs and develop common goals and objectives. Although programs might remain categorical, communities could blend funds through shared decisionmaking across programs. Communities could set performance standards that are relevant to program goals.

- Support development of unified local governance boards, recognized at the federal and state levels, that would have authority over multiple initiatives to provide continuity and coordination. These boards could concentrate on implementing a similar vision and overcoming turf issues.

Programs governed by consolidated boards can lose their relevance to the targeted population if board members do not maintain an appropriate focus on the local community, and local governance structures must take this into account when forming such boards.

State and Federal Collaboration Issues and Solutions

Communities often have difficulty establishing comprehensive services because state and federal agencies are separate and categorical and require multiple separate reporting and budgeting efforts. This places burdens on local administrators' time and efforts. For local communities to be successful in implementing comprehensive service programs, state and local agencies must model the process. Some steps that would facilitate solutions include:

- Coordinate separate and duplicative reporting requirements within state and federal departments, which would save time and money and allow communities time to use a single set of data to improve programs.

- Issue joint program requests for proposals, to save time and allow access to multiple funding sources. Administrators could spend less time on applying for funds and more on implementing and improving programs.

Issues with Eligibility Requirements and Solutions

Varying and sometimes conflicting state and federal program eligibility requirements pose barriers to comprehensive services. These multiple requirements place a burden on families as well as service providers, and can result in families failing to receive needed services.

The following solutions can ease this problem:

- Develop consistent, unified eligibility requirements for families to gain access to services from state and federal programs.

- Develop program eligibility based on geographic location (perhaps by Census tract) and poverty status to reduce administrative costs and provide supports in high poverty areas. The Title I provision for schoolwide projects in areas of concentrated poverty could be adapted to other agencies and programs.

Participants warned that, while it may be possible for a single federal department to combine its funding streams, it will be more difficult to do so across agencies. Also, sharing information between programs can create confidentiality problems.

Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Problems and Solutions

Communities need technical assistance to properly implement comprehensive service initiatives. For example, collaboration may not occur without training in the collaborative process; a local practitioner building a local planning group's capacity for collaboration is a lengthy process.

Communities need support and capacity building to understand program requirements and how to pool funding, as well as to develop a common vision and goal. Often local program administrators do not implement comprehensive services because they do not understand which program regulations really exist and which are "bureaucratic mythology."

Participants suggested the following solutions:

- Develop a guidance document or matrix at the federal level that shows how funding streams operate

- Develop and disseminate high-quality research findings and collect effective strategies to disseminate to the field and model effective ways of measuring and displaying progress toward the outcomes

- Provide hands-on, in-person technical assistance from the federal government, including training across programs and disciplines

- Communities must engage in collaborative-process training to successfully implement comprehensive service projects

Accountability Issues and Solutions

Currently, different programs have different performance standards or quality indicators for accountability; this makes service integration a challenge. Lack of clarity in performance standards leads to ineffective use of program funds. Although standards should be universally high, different communities will require different inputs to achieve the same standards.

Participants suggested the following solutions:

- Develop and define high performance standards or quality indicators for performance mandated by Congress
- Allow local program administrators to develop quality indicators appropriate to the population and community
- Develop a national framework of indicators at the federal level to ensure that results can be compared across populations and communities
- Define corrective measures for projects that do not meet the standards out, as well as effective ways of measuring and displaying progress toward expected results
- Define expectations at state and federal levels and allow local communities to be held accountable for achieving them

Guidance on Key Steps for Federal, State, and Local Policymakers

Key Steps for Achieving Better Results for Children and Families	Federal Level	State Level	Local Level
1. Assess conditions, assets, and resources to develop priorities for resource allocation and accountability.	A. An Executive Branch-Congressional partnership, in consultation with states and communities, is needed to ensure the construction of a national policy statement and priorities for the education, health, and well-being of children and families. The agenda should be broad enough to be adaptable to states and communities, but specific enough to facilitate the benchmarking of state efforts. B. Congress should direct the relevant federal agencies to conduct a cross-agency assessment of: 1. The conditions of families and children; 2. The federal programs, roles, and goals that address the conditions of children and families; 3. The unique "value added" by each agency's programs and priorities; and 4. Current allocation of resources, with special attention to policies, procedures, and requirements that align or do not align with the goals outlined in the national mission statement.	A. Each state should set goals and quantifiable objectives, consistent with national priorities, for the condition of children from prebirth to adolescence. B. Each state should conduct a cross-agency assessment of (1) the conditions of families and children in the state and (2) assets and resources, both human and fiscal, for children and families to inform goals and objectives. C. Each state should use the assessment for resource allocation and accountability measures for achievement of the goals. D. Each state should convene and publish an annual review of the conditions of children and families to guide the state's progress toward achieving these goals.	A. Local communities should assess their status in relation to state objectives and national priorities for the healthy development of children and families. B. Local communities should conduct an assessment of conditions, resources, and assets to support children and families. C. Based on the assessment, local communities should: 1. Establish priorities for desired results 2. Allocate resources to achieve desired results

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Key Steps for Achieving Better Results for Children and Families	Federal Level	State Level	Local Level
1. (Cont'd.) Assess conditions, assets, and resources to develop priorities for resource allocation and accountability.	C. Federal agencies should use the cross-agency assessment to determine resource allocation and accountability measures for state and local entities. D. In consultation with states and communities, Congress should review its existing committee structures and develop coordinating mechanisms to ensure attention to the cross-agency assessment.		

Key Steps for Achieving Better Results for Children and Families	Federal Level	State Level	Local Level
2. Develop unified goals with compatible, coordinated plans for improving results.	A. Congress working with the Executive Branch, should require the alignment of goals, objectives, regulations, and resource allocations across all major federal agencies in accordance with the national policy statement and priorities for children. B. Congress working with the Executive Branch, should allow and encourage the federal agencies to create a cross-agency structure to carry out a unified planning, research and evaluation process that sets forth measurable results consistent with the national policy statement and priorities. This cross-agency planning structure will: 1. Collect and supply data to the states 2. Help the states interpret data and develop state-level plans C. Congress working with the Executive Branch, should provide incentives for state to invest in preventing the interrelated problems that contribute to crises for children and families.	A. Through a coordinated planning process, each state should develop benchmarks and performance targets related to the education, health, and well-being of children from age 0-18. B. Each state should ensure the alignment of goals, objectives, regulations, and resource allocations within all major state agencies, in accordance with state goals. C. Each state should establish a unified planning mechanism to: 1. Ensure that state agencies work together to achieve state goals 2. Designate the units that will carry out community-based planning within the state, on a scale that facilitates the involvement of all stakeholders 3. Ensure broad-based participation in achieving the goals at the local level 4. Provide information, resources, access to technology that builds local capacity, and technical assistance to support local planning processes 5. Establish a cross-agency system of data collection and uniform reporting requirements that will guide and inform continuous program improvement	A. Local communities should establish one consolidated planning and accountability process for programs for children and families. The plans developed through this process will establish benchmarks and performance targets relating to the education, health, and well-being of children from age 0-18. B. Local communities should convene a broad-based planning entity to produce a plan to improve the conditions of children and families. 1. Parents, consumers, and other community members must be an integral part of the planning group. 2. Local agencies should obtain technical assistance from the state to develop local capacity for producing a viable plan.

Key Steps for Achieving Better Results for Children and Families	Federal Level	State Level	Local Level
3. Ensure shared accountability for equity and results.	A. Congress and the Executive Branch should use the national priorities as the infrastructure for a federal-state-local partnership for children and families that emphasizes their importance to society and the national economy. 1. The federal government should use the results of the cross-agency assessment to determine resource allocation and accountability measures. 2. The federal government should collect and publish data from each state relevant to achievement of the national priorities.	A. Each state should establish standards and priorities that fall within the broad national priorities and reflect conditions of children and families within the state. State priorities should reflect a commitment to equity across sub-populations. B. Each state, in broad consultation with communities, should develop a set of overall performance targets that take into account the developmental stages and competencies of children and youth (0-18). State results should be disaggregated by age, geography, gender, and ethnicity. C. Each state, in negotiation with communities, should establish specific performance targets for each local jurisdiction based on baseline data/conditions. D. Each state, in broad consultation with communities, should establish a system of incentives and sanctions based on local achievement of targeted outcomes and the achievement of more equitable results across different populations (e.g. race, gender, age).	A. Local communities should identify priorities among established goals based on local conditions of children and families. 1. State and local data should be used to support the development of priorities. 2. Local community results should be disaggregated by age, gender, and ethnicity. B. Local community planning entities should work with states to determine the appropriate application of incentives and sanctions.

Key Steps for Achieving Better Results for Children and Families	Federal Level	State Level	Local Level
4. Review and align policies and allocate all available resources to enact priorities.	A. Congress working with the Executive Branch, should create a way local communities can coordinate existing initiatives serving the same populations (e.g., initiatives for young children and their families including certain programs in ESEA, Family Preservation and Support, Head Start, Healthy Start, and IDEA). These coordinated initiatives should include mechanisms for unified planning and eligibility requirements, reduced regulation, common goals, and coordinated planning and reporting processes at the state and local level. Any reduction in administrative costs should be reinvested in programs that serve children and families. B. Congress working with the Executive Branch, should develop incentives, authority, and flexibility for federal agencies to develop collaborative strategies and cross-agency initiatives. C. In developing federal initiatives, federal agencies should maximize opportunities to ensure that families move toward self-sufficiency and that children are nurtured and supported. All federal initiatives for children and families should be structured to: 1. Respond to priorities of state and community plans to the greatest extent possible without compromising quality 2. Provide broad flexibility in the use of funds to meet family and community needs where those uses are aligned with coordinated plans	A. In response to local needs, each state should shift funds and reallocate resources to the greatest extent possible to ensure sufficient resources to attain priority results. B. Each state should work to identify and eliminate barriers and mandates from the federal level and within the state government that impede achievement of the goals. C. Each state should maximize opportunities to ensure that families move toward self-sufficiency and that children are nurtured and supported. States should provide flexibility so that resources can be used to support comprehensive plans. D. Each state should develop incentives for local communities to develop and practice collaborative approaches, including creation of flexible funding pools to address high-priority issues and results-based, innovative approaches.	A. Local communities should allocate resources to ensure an equitable distribution of services among local populations to meet priorities. B. Local communities should provide incentives for all service providers to develop innovative approaches and track their impact on children and families. C. Local communities should develop and use integrated information capacity to enhance access to programs, evaluation, and continuous program improvement.

Key Steps for Achieving Better Results for Children and Families	Federal Level	State Level	Local Level
4. (Cont'd.) Review and align policies and allocate all available resources to enact priorities.	D. Federal agencies should develop incentives for state and local agencies to support coordinated approaches. For example, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act includes incentives for realigning resources to promote cross-agency interaction. Similar provisions across other federal programs should be expanded. E. The federal government should map out current efforts across all relevant agencies for the development and provision of quality information systems, professional development (pre-service and in-service), and technical assistance to states and local communities. Working with communities and states, federal government should develop a plan for how these resources can be more effectively pooled and used. F. Federal agencies should direct/redirect resources to promote state-level innovations that are effective in developing the infrastructure described above and promote opportunities for states to learn from each other. G. Federal agencies should provide incentives to the states to develop information network capacity to enhance knowledge, access to programs, evaluation, and continuous program improvement.	E. Each state should map out current efforts across agencies focused on the development and provision of information systems, professional development (pre-service and in-service), and technical assistance. Each state should develop a plan for combining and using these resources more effectively. F. Each state should seek out non-governmental resources (businesses, foundations, non-profit organizations, and universities) to support development and enhance the quality of the infrastructure described above, including information, professional development, training of youth/children workers, and technical assistance. G. Each state should work to develop integrated information capacity to enhance knowledge, access to programs, evaluation, and continuous program improvement.	

Key Steps for Achieving Better Results for Children and Families	Federal Level	State Level	Local Level
5. Design and reconfigure programs, services and supports, and infrastructure to ensure that priority results are achieved.	A. Federal agencies should review existing programs and develop strategies to align and strengthen their contribution to improving results for children and families through interagency efforts and public/private partnerships. B. Federal agencies should work with other public and nongovernmental agencies to support the most progressive and effective state initiatives. The federal government should chronicle the information, support cross-connection across states, and make the information available to other local, state and national leaders working with the Executive Branch. C. Congress working with the Executive Branch, should create mechanisms to mobilize and increase access to private and nonprofit expertise to identify opportunities, resources, and technologies that can contribute to achieving national priorities. D. Congress should provide incentives and encouragement for the corporate sector to create family-friendly workplaces and invest in programs that support children and families.	A. Each state should identify promising strategies and share this information with communities. B. Each state should identify relevant research and share this information with communities. C. Each state should review the effectiveness of existing programs and services and shift resources to those with proven results. D. Each state should provide technical assistance to communities to strengthen their capacity to improve services. E. Each state should establish public/private partnerships to create and develop resources and technologies, technical assistance, and infrastructure to assist efforts at state and local levels. F. Each state should work with media to inform the public about the condition of children and the need for public involvement in solutions.	A. Communities should ensure that families get the help they need whenever they need it. 1. Services should be accessible and available at convenient times for families. 2. Services should be culturally responsive and respectful of individuals and families. 3. Services should recognize the strengths of families and engage them in solving their own problems. B. Communities should engage informal support systems such as communities and religious organizations. C. Communities should identify and seek the involvement of public, private, and nonprofit resources to improve the education, health, and well-being of children and families. D. Communities should work with local media to inform the public about the condition of children and the need for stronger families.

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Members of the Working Group on Comprehensive Services[1]

JEANNE JEHL
Executive Director, Working Group on Comprehensive Services
U.S. Department of Education
Washington, DC

Michele Cahill
Fund for the City of New York
New York, NY

Hedy Chang
California Tomorrow
San Francisco, CA

Sid Gardner
California State University
Fullerton, CA

Nancy Grasmick
State Superintendent of Education
Baltimore, MD

Cheryl Hayes
The Finance Project
Washington, DC

Con Hogan
Vermont Agency of Human Services
Waterbury, VT

Otis Johnson
Savannah-Chatham Youth Futures Authority
Savannah, GA

Sharon Lynn Kagan
Yale Bush Center
New Haven, CT

Mark Kavarsky
Principal, I.S. 218
New York, NY

Janet Levy
Annie E. Casey Foundation
Baltimore, MD

Toni Martorelli
Dept. of Family and Community Services
Albuquerque, NM

Linda McCart
National Governors Association
Washington, DC

Harriet Meyer
Ounce of Prevention Fund
Chicago, IL

Vicki Phillips
Children Achieving Challenge
Philadelphia, PA

Wendy Puriefoy
Public Education Fund Network
Washington, DC

Bill Shepardson
Council of Chief State School Officers
Washington, DC

Ed Tetelman
New Jersey Department of Human Services
Trenton, NJ

Lucy Trujillo
Family Resource Coalition
Denver, CO

Heather Weiss
Harvard Family Research Project
Cambridge, MA

Joan Wynn
Chapin Hall Center for Children
Chicago, IL

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